

Brazil finally gives go ahead for new dam construction

Brazil's environment agency, Ibama, has approved work to begin on the huge Belo Monte hydroelectric dam on a tributary of the Amazon River. It is expected to cost between US\$11 billion and US\$17 billion, and provide electricity to 23 million homes. Contracts to build what will become the third largest dam in the world were finally signed last year after years of protests, and this week Ibama has given the go ahead for 588 acres

of forest to be cleared. However, further legal challenges are likely from groups opposed to the project.

The Brazilian government believes the new dam is crucial for development and will create jobs but environmental groups say the 6km-long dam will make some 50,000 people homeless because 500 sq km of land will be flooded.

Kidney cancer patients denied drug that could extend their lives

The drug, called everolimus, will not be made freely available to patients through the publicly funded National Health Service (NHS) because the drug approval body says it does not offer enough benefit to patients to justify the cost. An estimated eight-week treatment would cost the health service, and therefore taxpayers, £5,264 per patient.

Patient support groups have hit out at the decision saying people with rare cancers were being penalised. Around 4,000 people in England and Wales are diagnosed each year with advanced kidney cancer.

A spokesperson for the charity Macmillan Cancer Support said: 'We are disappointed

by the decision. For a patient with terminal cancer the drug could mean the difference between being given a few weeks to live and a few months.'

The Chief Executive at the drug approval body for the NHS said: 'A diagnosis of cancer is devastating for patients and those who care for them and we are disappointed not to be able to recommend the drug as a treatment option. However, we have to ensure that the money available to the NHS is used to best effect, particularly when NHS funds, like the rest of the public sector, are under considerable financial pressure.'